

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 59NEWSWEEK
20 DECEMBER 1982

TERRORISM

Bulgaria, the KGB and the Pope

Everywhere they dig, Italian antiterrorist police keep turning up Bulgarians. Three weeks ago they arrested a Bulgarian Airlines official for complicity in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. Then last week an Italian magistrate named two men connected to the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome as the Bulgarian's accomplices; both had already reached safety in Bulgaria. Other Italian magistrates have reportedly linked more Bulgarians to a drug- and arms-smuggling ring—and to the Red Brigades' kidnapping a year ago of American Brig. Gen. James Dozier.

Many of the leads have reportedly originated with Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turkish gunman who shot the pope. As the Italian press tells it, Agca, who remained silent at his trial, is now talking—and implicating his colleagues. His story put Italian officials on the trail of the tiny Bulgarian secret service—which is regarded as little more than a tool of the Soviet KGB. The headlines gave new life to the accounts of NBC television journalists and terrorist expert Claire Sterling, who have reported that the KGB may have masterminded the attack on the pope. Moscow has angrily denied such accounts, which have become particularly sensitive since Soviet leader Yuri Andropov served as KGB chief at the time of the shooting.

Three Men: Agca's story, as leaked to Italian papers, claims that a Turkish terrorist with Bulgarian contacts introduced him to the three men the Italians have charged in the plot: Sergei Ivanov Antonov, Rome manager of Bulgarian Airlines; Teodorov Ayvazov, a cashier at the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome, and Jelio Kolev Vassiliev, a for-

mer secretary to the Bulgarian military attaché at the embassy. Agca claims that those three men worked out the plot with another Turk, Bekir Celenk, who offered him \$1.2 million to kill the pope.

On May 13, as Agca told it, Antonov and Ayvazov picked him up in a blue Alfa Romeo and drove to the vicinity of St. Peter's. The three men took positions in the square. Ayvazov, said Agca, carried a hand grenade; both Ayvazov and Antonov also had pistols. But their scheme unraveled. After Agca wounded the pope, police caught him and found a paper in his pocket bearing the telephone numbers of the Bulgarian Embassy and consulate, the Bulgarian Airlines office where Antonov worked and Ayvazov's residence. Agca now reportedly says the Bulgarians had promised to rescue him if he was captured. Their failure, he says, prompted him to reveal the conspiracy.

Agca wasn't the only one implicating Bulgarians. Last week Luigi Scricciolo, a leftist trade-union leader in jail since last February in connection with the Dozier kidnapping, admitted he had received precise instructions from employees of the Bulgarian Embassy to make contact with the Red Brigades. The Bulgarians supposedly offered the Red Brigades arms and money in return for NATO information obtained from Dozier. Scricciolo also apparently kept tabs on the Italian Communist Party for the Bulgarians, reporting on support within the party for the Polish trade union Solidarity; that information was presumably funneled to the Soviets.

At the least, the Bulgarian government had a public-relations mess on its hands. Sofia

hinted at a swap—Antonov for two Italian tourists picked up in Bulgaria last summer and held for espionage. The Italians rejected the idea. Meanwhile, the investigating judge in Rome issued warrants for five Turks accused of aiding the Bulgarians. Three were already in detention; the fourth, Celenk, the man who allegedly offered Agca the money, was in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians promptly arrested Celenk and said they would look into his role in the papal plot. The gesture didn't appease Rome. And it won't take any heat off Bulgaria.

KIM ROGAL with CAROLYN FRIDAY in Rome

Agca: Talking

